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Moscow's terror



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WASHINGTON — An acrimonious flap developed early in the Reagan Administration concerning Soviet involvement, or lack of it, in global terrorism.

When top officials of the new regime fingered the Kremlin as a culprit in the terrorism business, they were hit with a quick bombardment from the CIA and other sources saying that it wasn't so.

The Soviets, we were informed, didn't get involved in international terror — or, if they did, we had somehow failed to come up with evidence of their complicity.

A useful study is now at hand suggesting that, if the CIA is not aware of Soviet involvement in global terror, the fault must be the CIA's.

For there is ample evidence in the record showing that Moscow and various of its clients are neck-deep in promoting terrorism, despite occasional pious statements to the contrary.

Data going to prove the point are pulled together by Herbert Romerstein, a professional staff member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, in a monograph just published by the Foundation for Democratic Education.

And while the subject falls within the realm of Romerstein's professional expertise, he has carefully documented his case with materials from the public record.

Part of the problem in this debate, Romerstein notes, is that people confuse Marxist-Leninist objections to purely random terror with opposition to terrorism as such.

In point of fact the founding fathers of Communism, and the present rulers of the Kremlin, have made it plain that they approve of terrorism, and support it whenever it will serve their purposes. In recent years that has turned out to be quite frequently.

A foremost example of such support is Moscow's relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is openly terrorist in its operations and makes no bones about attacking purely civilian as opposed to military targets in the state of Israel and gives backing to terrorist groups and actions elsewhere.

Romerstein supplies evidence that the Soviets furnish arms, military training and financial support to the PLO, both directly and through intermediaries.

An equally prominent instance of Soviet-supported terrorism is the case of Cuba, which has been busily exporting terrorism and political violence all over Latin America since the 1960s.

Romerstein documents the crucial role of the Cubans in fomenting terrorism in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Uruguay, Bolivia and other states; their effort to coordinate the actions of terrorist and revolutionary groups, and the consistent support afforded their activities by the Soviets.

A third major example is Libya,

which is a principal supporter of the PLO, and a supplier of training groups, and weapons for left-wing terrorists of every possible description.

Libya is in turn supported by Moscow and the East European states. A similar role as safe house and training ground is performed by South Yemen — a puppet of the U.S.S.R.

One point that emerges clearly from this discussion is the numerous interconnections among the terrorist groups: PLO support for the Sandinistas, Castro's involvement in Africa, Japanese extremists attacking the Israelis — all with leading strings that go back to the Kremlin.

Occasionally, Moscow even gets caught directly, as when Mexico discovered the KGB recruiting terrorists for training in North Korea.

The usual routine, however, is to act through faithful proxies — such as the PLO, or Cuba, or East Germany — connections which are a bit more difficult, but hardly impossible, to trace.

Romerstein lays it all out for us to see, and one wonders how the boys at CIA contrived to miss it.